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ABORTION AND ITS LESSON.

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The prevention of abortion is a vexatious subject that has been receiving the most solicitous attention, and occupying the minds of all philanthropic people, both lay and professional, for not only the present age, but for past generations. Notwithstanding such attention, however, the fact is patent to all, that the crime is increasing with alarming rapidity. The clergy have preached to, and warned their congregations against the evil practice; lawyers have drafted new laws upon it, and have sought to enforce existing ones against it; and doctors have discussed means for its prevention; but all with little or no avail, for the pregnant woman still seeks to destroy her unborn offspring, and the abortionist continues to reap his yearly increasing harvests of blood money. It is an evil that will "not down!" and, like its fellow crime of intemperance, it seems to thrive upon opposition.

As noted above, the plan hitherto followed for the suppression of abortion has been legislation and moral suasion by the lawyers and clergymen, while the medical profession, as a whole, have held up to woman's gaze the present and remote deleterious effects upon her health of thus contravening nature and nature's laws. There is undoubtedly a sufficient means, in all cases, for supplanting evil practices, and the only trouble consists in the difficulty of selecting the proper means. The present existence and growth of the evil, abortion, is presumptive evidence that the means used for its suppression is in part, or wholly, inadequate to the end. As physicians, we have nothing to do with the moral aspect of the crime; our province ceases with the consideration of its hygienics. But as citizens we are inter-



ested in any and all means promising the suppression of this with all other crimes. If the evil were confined to illegitimate pregnancies, and only practised as a means for preventing betrayed girls' shame from publicity, it might then be more subject to control. The evil is, however, by no means restricted to this class, for married women practice the abomination in a much larger ratio than do their single sisters. It has been said that while no station in society is free from the evil, the rich and educated portions are those who are most addicted to it. I believe the very opposite to be true, and while I have no doubt that such people do at times murder their unborn children, still the poor and the uneducated commit the crime, in proportion to their number, much more frequently, and for the reason that they have much more cause to do so. Poor, and especially working women, become pregnant much oftener than their more fortunate sisters. There are many good and sufficient reasons for this. Wealthy women are very liable to live sedentary lives, and hence do not get the exercise which is always conducive to good health; working women, on the contrary, get plenty of it, and as a consequence, are stronger and healthier, and a healthy woman is much more liable to become pregnant than one who is sickly, or if not absolutely sickly, at least weakly. Again, there is not the same motive to commit the crime, if people are wealthy, as they have plenty to feed, clothe, and educate their children with; while the very reverse is true of the poor. Another reason why wealthy women do not become pregnant, is that they are, as a rule, better educated, and, as is well known, as people become more and more enlightened, they are less liable to bear many children; they have as many as they want and no more, while the unenlightened have many more than they want or can care for properly.

The old and much worn argument of "duty to bear children," does not apply in these crowded days, and if it did, are there any who are verdant enough to think for a moment that a single one of the parents with families composed of a dozen children,

graded all the way from one year to twelve, thought of his or her duty while begetting any one of their numerous progeny? I trow not. In most instances they simply thought of their unbridled brute passions, and at the supreme moment of coition were absolutely thoughtless and regardless of results. In a recent journal I noticed the following: "The ends of nature are defied, and one of her laws violated whenever the holier purposes of intercourse are ignored, and indulgence is had simply to gratify the baser passions." I should like to inquire of each individual reader how often he indulges in sexual intercourse for any purpose other than to gratify his animal passions? The idea of one's indulging in sexual union, because of his or her duty to society, "nature's laws," or "holy purposes," is preposterous as well as ludicrous, in fact. If there were no more pleasure in coition than in shaking hands, I apprehend the next generation would be pretty small in point of numbers, even though duty were constantly knocking at the door of a dutiful people. It has been said that people sometimes "mistake potatoes for principles," and I greatly fear they also mistake the gratification of their carnal desires and the animal part of their natures for duty. At times, at least, they use duty to their Maker and country as an excuse for their licentiousness, and try to force the cheat upon their own consciences and the public, which is the same thing. As a rule, men feel this duty to beget children much more keenly than women, and the circumstances would seem to indicate that the bearing of them might have something to do with blunting that sense of duty.

Some one has said, that "there is more prostitution within the connubial state than outside of it." That being true, is it any wonder that the miserable creatures seek to rid themselves of its fruit by committing abortion? Some medical teachers and writers have pandered to the notion spread among the people by the priesthood, that it is their duty to raise many children, and have prefaced the books they have written with claims that certain diseases were the penalty paid by those who seek to escape childbearing, either by prevention of conception, or

by celibacy. The profession have to bear the odium of its members' mistakes often enough, without adding to the already large number this foolish and absurd fanaticism. Chief among the claims made, is the one that the act of prevention, by whatever means accomplished, produces at the time congestion of the female sexual apparatus, and frequent repetitions of this condition induce hypertrophy and hyperplasia of the uterus and ovaries. There might be a little force to this kind of argument, only for the well known fact that there is always congestion of these organs during sexual intercourse from natural causes, and that as soon as the act is accomplished, the congestion, or determination of blood to the part begins to subside. If the act be not finished, the congestion also begins to subside as soon as contact ceases. If prevention is accomplished by the use of a syringe, then the subsidence of congestion is hastened by the process; else why do we use the syringe in cases of congestion, and inflammation of those parts? It must be apparent to all physicians that this congestive pathology is a myth. Again, in reply to the claim that disease follows as a result of prevention, every gynecologist in the country will bear me out in the statement, that more than two thirds of the diseases of women are either directly or indirectly caused by the parturient state or process. It seems then, this being true, that married women are less liable, by two-thirds, to become victims of disease if they prevent conception; this premise is, I believe, literally true. It, however, reduces the horns of the dilemma to two, either of which can be taken.

Admitting the foregoing statements to be true, it would surely seem as though the means hitherto used were insufficient for controlling and suppressing this most revolting of crimes, abortion. So long as men and women are possessed of their present animal passions, abortions will be, as at present, of frequent occurrence, and abortionists will thrive and increase, as the demand for their services is increased; the old rule of supply and demand. They are daily becoming more and more expert in their iniquitous trade, and are now able in most

cases to defy the processes of law. Conviction is the exception, instead of, as it should be, the rule. That the cure for this festering ulcer consists of the prevention of pregnancy, and that alone, I am, and have been for a long time convinced, and since time has demonstrated the futility of all legislation against abortion, and the abortionist, as well as the people's utter disregard of the sermons of our most eloquent divines, upon the wickedness and immorality of the act, it would do no harm to at least try some other tactics. If every physician would teach each one of his patrons how to prevent conception, abortion would be throttled in a twelve-month, and the abortionist would have to "seek pastures new."

As stated in a former article, I do not believe that any woman should be forced to become an unwilling mother, if for no other reason than the physiological one, that the neurasthenia of the pregnant woman has a pernicious influence upon the child in utero.

In answer to the theory of very good people, if conception were not prevented it might result in a human being and perhaps a useful one, we may say that its exact parallel exists in the menstruating woman who each month allows her ovule to escape unimpregnated and to become destroyed. If fecundated it might make a useful human being, but no one would class such destruction as either immoral or criminal, although nature impels the woman to seek fecundation near the time of eruption. There are large numbers of old married people, long since past the child bearing period, who have practiced prevention during the whole course of their married life, and methinks they would laugh to scorn, the physician who told them they must pay the penalty of disease for their indiscretion.

As to the danger of our race becoming extinct, perhaps it will be a comfort to those earnest philanthropists who make direst claims, to know that at the present rate of immigration and increase the public domain will be exhausted in thirty-five years.

Some months ago I wrote an article which was published in the NEWS, and in that article I touched upon this subject of prevention of conception.

Since that time I have received numerous letters from physicians endorsing the position taken, and asking me to give them what I considered some of the best methods of preventing conception. These letters show that a portion of the profession see the necessity of dealing with this matter by some other method than by telling their patients to "let nature take its course" if they would escape dire consequences. The following letter received since I commenced this article, is a fair sample of the many received since the publication by the NEWS of the article referred to above, and as it illustrates the position taken, I give it, minus the doctor's name: "DR. O. E. HERRICK.

Dear Doctor—Do you know of any certain method of preventing conception? There are many women who have large families now, whom it would be doing a kindness to post them so that they might rest a while, until they could do justice to their already numerous progeny. Any information on the subject will be thankfully received and liquidated if necessary."

Yours,

———, M. D.

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In answer to this and other letters I will give what I consider safe, and at the same time effectual treatment. Injections as ordinarily used are very unreliable, if only water is used, but if carbolic acid is added to the water, and it is used immediately after connection, it will often prevent conception. Injections properly used, if of nothing but pure water, are an absolute protection. They should be used with a vaginal syringe, with a large speculum pipe as large as an ordinary glass tubular speculum, with the rubber bulb attached directly to the end of the speculum pipe and no rubber tubing intervening. These syringes are now made by several different manufacturers, and are all of about equal merit. The Rubber Co. make a very good one with vaginal pipe and bulb all rubber; the others have a glass pipe with a rubber bulb attached. The first syringe of this kind made, was in New York, and is now called the "Comstock Syringe" after Anthony Comstock, who prosecuted the manufacturers for sending

the syringes with directions for using, through the mails. He was beaten, however, and has the honor of having a useful instrument named after him. These syringes wash the whole vaginal canal, and, after the fluid is expelled from the bulb into the vagina, by allowing the bulb to gradually expand under the hand, the fluid is drawn from the vagina back into the syringe bulb again, bringing with it the whole contents of the vagina. If one of these syringes be promptly used after intercourse, conception will surely be prevented, for every drop of the male fluid deposited within the vagina is removed with the withdrawal of the injected fluid by the expansion of the syringe bulb. I have recently noticed a syringe advertised in the News, by Parke, Davis & Co. that I have no doubt would answer the purpose nicely, as it has a large speculum pipe, and thus washes every portion of the vagina, a point that is essential in an instrument used for this purpose. With a little practice these syringes can be used without spilling a drop of the fluid, and hence can be used without getting out of bed.

Of the other means to be employed for the purpose of prevention, withdrawal of the male organ before ejaculation takes place, may be mentioned as one of the oldest means, and has been practiced by many people without bad effects, except in the diminution of pleasure. Notwithstanding the claim by some medical writers that bad results must follow such practices, and I apprehend that those promised results are theoretical rather than practical. Of the medicines used in injections, carbolic acid stands at the head, on account of its well-known effects upon low forms of organisms. Acids added to the fluids to be injected will also destroy the vitality of the semen. Plumbi acetat, zinci sulphat, acid salicylicum, etc., will undoubtedly produce the same results if brought in contact with all the spermatozoa deposited within the vagina. The introduction of pieces of sponge into the vagina before connection, has proved to be ineffectual sometimes; and I have also known women to be disappointed who placed confidence in a "womb veil. After giving considerable attention to the subject, and watching closely

the results in people whom I knew were practicing the measures, I am convinced that the only sure preventive is in injections, as detailed above. Perhaps some will say that this plan has too much paraphernalia about it, and necessitates the taking of too much trouble, and that, too, at a time when the nervous organism is most inclined to indolence. In reply to this I can only say that if the game is not worth the powder, why, they need not use it. But in support of the practical workings of the plan, I can call to mind numerous poor women, who were married slaves to their husbands lust, who have pursued this method for years since I took pity upon their miserable condition, and taught it to them. Without any more responsibilities of the kind being added to their already large number, thus giving them time to properly care for what they have, I have also noticed that these women are not among those who apply for gynæcological treatment. The latter patients, on the contrary, come from the rapid childbearing women. This has been the rule in my practice as I have no doubt it has been with other physicians engaged in the treatment of diseases of women.

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